787 Amongst the Ba-Ronga the ill-omen is not considered so serious.
82 Later on, when the child loses his first teeth, he must not
856 let them fall out hap-hazard anywhere. He must take the fallen tooth, go to the ash-heap, put his finger into the hole and say : "Kokwa, kokwa, ndji hwe hobe !" (Grandfather, grandfather, give me a grain of maize !) Then he throws the tooth over his shoulder on to the ashes and goes home without looking backward. Should he look backward, his grandfather (the spirit of the departed ?) would not give him a new tooth (1). This custom is no longer taboo and is disappearing.

856 When a younger brother cuts his teeth, they are considered
163 as pushing away or pulling out the teeth of the elder, as the younger brother comes into the world, as a rule, three years after the elder.

As regards *hair*, the first cutting is accompanied by the following
302 custom : the mother sprinkles some drops of her milk on the
836 forehead and on the occiput of the child ; then she cuts his hair and throws it away in the midst of thick grass. When she cuts her own hair, she always leaves a lock on both sides of the head for the amusement of the child, till he is able to walk.

853 Nursing women very often anoint themselves with ochre. This is said to be in order to prevent their husbands from having relations with them.

These rites are not considered as very important. But there are three others which are most punctiliously observed, and which divide the nursing period into three subperiods : the presentation to the moon, after three months, the tying of the cotton string, after one year, and the weaning ceremonies at the close of the period.

### 4) The presentation to the moon (ku yandla).

821 The appearance of the new moon is always received with cheers by the Ba-Ronga. The first person who sees it shouts :

(1) Comparative Ethnography : I remember quite well that, when I was a boy, we were told in Neuchâtel that we must not let a broken tooth get lost, lest it should be found by a dog and a dog's tooth would grow in its stead !

535
881

with a heap of grass and the men say : " He is dead !," because a circumcised boy cannot fall and live. One of the shepherds goes in haste to a village of the neighbouring tribe and buys a fowl ; this is killed and its blood is sprinkled over the grass ; the boy who fell escapes when the women have gone home, but the next day, when they come back to the spot, they see the blood and are convinced that, in very truth, one of the circumcised dies when he falls!

Sometimes a little child is taken from the arms of its mother and brought to the place where the boys are sitting hidden during the dance. They kiss him and smile at him, because he is innocent; he may see what women are not allowed to contemplate!

III. *The last day.*

881

The last day is marked by the greatest and most difficult trial. During the whole preceding night, the boys are not allowed to sleep. Sleep is the last enemy they must overcome. They stab the Elephant and repeat the formulae till the morning. Then all the bits of skin remaining from the circumcising are picked up by the Manyabe ; he burns them, and makes them into a powder with which he smears the mulagaru pole. All the masks and grass mats are thrown on to the roof of the shed and, at dawn, the troop of circumcised, surrounded by the shepherds and men, is directed towards a pool and made to run to it without looking backwards ; (separation from the sungi, from the seclusion period). If they were to look at what is taking place behind them, their eyes would be pierced, and they would be blind for ever! Fire is set to the whole establishment by some of the men, and all the filth and ignorance of childhood is burnt in this great conflagration. The boys are led into the water, wash away the white clay shouting : " I am a man," cut their hair (separation rite), anoint themselves with ochre, put on new clothing and are addressed by the father of the circumcision :

[302]

" You are no longer *shuburu*! Try now to behave like men. It would be unworthy of you to steal sweet potatoes in the fields as you used to do before. Now the Ngoma is closed and it is taboo

765 783 302

well as the obligation of using special spoons, refer only to the diggers and the widows.

Other rites must be performed by the whole community.

First the *cutting of the hair*, which must be complete for the widows and the near relations. Men sometimes cut only one strand on each side, women cut from the forehead to the nape of the neck. The operation is performed either by the doctor or by anybody who is familiar with it, and the instrument used is either an iron razor or a bit of glass. They say this shaving is an act of respect for the dead, also a sign of sadness and a means of preventing the *mayiha*, the impression of the hair standing on end from fear of death. Should mourners forget to cut their hair, they might lose their senses, and become delirious (hahama).

765 783 604

Then they put on *malopa*, viz, pieces of dark blue cotton cloth which have been used for a long time amongst the Ba-Ronga. The first widow must have them before she enters the enclosure of the second vapour bath.

A third general rite is the *luma milomo*, the purification of the food of the deceased. This is not a medicinal operation, but it seems that, by this act, every relative removes from himself the danger which is in the contaminated food. The word *luma*, which we shall often find in the Thonga ritual, means originally to bite (like a dog) or to cause violent, internal pain (colic or pains of labour). But in the ritual terminology it means to accomplish certain rites in relation to some given food in order to remove the danger which is attached to it. The *milomo* are seeds of each kind of cereal which the deceased had in his storehouses. Some beans, grains of maize, kaffir corn, kaffir peas, etc., are cooked and poured into one of the baskets (lihlelo) of the deceased. The *ntukulu*, viz. the uterine nephew, the son of the sister of the deceased, is first called. It is he who must begin the rite and this is so important that, when people go to pay their mourning visit, they always take with them a girl or a boy who is a " ntukulu " of the one they mourn. The child stands before the pot, his feet together. The master of the mourning, (in this case, the first widow) kneels before him, takes a few drops from the pot, and some of the cooked food which remains at the bottom, and pours

765 anointed with the medicine. As regards adults, the operation of
783 *magango* is performed as follows ; the master of the mourning
516 passes his hand down from the knee to the toes. This rite[1] is evidently in connexion with the act of walking, which is thus purified, and with standing upright (*yima*), which means health and strength.

765 *Cutting the hair* is also a medicinal act amongst the Hlabis.
783 The physician takes a broken pot, pours into it water and a
302 purifying powder, washes the head of the deceased's wife with this preparation and cuts her hair with a razor. Everyone takes a little of the mixture and washes his own head, and they then shave each other. The hair is thrown away into the bush, not on the grave.

765 The Great Mourning is concluded by the *phunga*, the sprinkling,
783 corresponding to the Ronga *shuba*, which is performed exactly in
177 the same way while the water is still boiling. The doctor sprinkles
231 a whole potful on the people ; then he pours fresh water into the pot and sprinkles the doors, the back part of the kraals of the oxen and of the goats. —"How about the pigs ?" I asked Viguet. He laughed heartily! —"The pigs? They are nothing ! They have come from the White people They are so new to the country that lately the Pedis killed them outside the villages and the men only ate their flesh!" The pig has no part in the Bantu ritual!

## V. *Sexual rites of purification.*

765 This is a most curious and mysterious subject and, to understand
783 it thoroughly, it is necessary to penetrate deeply into the Bantu
834 mind and to forget our own conceptions of conjugal life. I hope none of my readers will be shocked by ceremonies which are evidently performed with the greatest earnestness and are a real aspiration toward purity, purity as it is conceived by a tribe still plunged in the dim notions of collective morality.

1 [among the Northern clans - Analyst]

l: Junod M-5 (1895-1909)1927 Thonga

169

# CHAPTER II

## The evolution of a woman from Birth to Death

*Essay of a Ronga girl on the subject.*

In July 1897, the School Inspector gave to the big girls of the Swiss Mission school at Lourenço Marques the following subject for an examination in composition: "The life of a Ronga woman." This is the translation of one of the pupils' essays on the life of their country women:

"When a girl is born amongst the Ba-Ronga, people come and congratulate the mother and say: "A ma buyeni mati," that is to say: "Let the water come!" When the time is at hand when she will come out of the hut, ochre is crushed for her and a calabash full of the fat of *nkuhlu* almond is prepared, and the two ingredients are mixed and smeared over her.

"Her curly hair is stretched out in corkscrew fashion, and ochre is put on it to transform it into a kind of rats' tails. (This is the operation called *hova ngoya*.) The mother also smears herself with ochre, and puts on her head a crown of small strings (shikupu) (1). Then, when the child lets her head fall on account of the weakness of her neck, a plaited string, which is just the right size for a necklace, is tied round her throat. 'Thus,' they say, 'her nape will be strengthened.'

"A small calabash with medicine is given her to drink; they also prepare for her a small pot of the medicine, and they say it

(1) I have heard this custom explained as follows: the mothers amuse the children by shaking their heads; the small strings dance about and make the babies laugh. This can only be true of infants already two or three months old.

643 301 them. But they were disappointed in their hope : Shiluvane kept both the ritlatla and the power and bequeathed them to his son, Muhlaba, as we shall see. Legends are current about the ritlatla. It is said to be able to move of its own will. "This piece of metal is indeed a wonderful thing," wrote a young Nkuna, to me "because when it is buried in the soil, as black people are in the habit of doing with their treasures, a piece of iron must be put inside it to prevent it from going away; if this precaution is not taken, the ritlatla may leave the place where it was and go somewhere else. In the space of one year, it may go as far as the Masetana spruit (about one mile)."

643 Another royal property of the Nkuna family was an *elephant's tusk*, which vanquished enemies had brought as a token of their submission.

643 342 787 In Nondwana, the old chief Papele who preceded Maphunga and lived in the middle of the last century, wore a *kind of chignon* or bun made by plaiting his hair, which was a sign of royalty (shifoko). But this custom has passed away. There was also *a long stick* which was kept exposed to the smoke of the royal fire in the sacred hut of *nyakwekulu*, which I shall describe presently, and which was called *ntjobo* and also *mhamba*, viz., offering; this was evidently of religious value to the clan, and was taken outside when the army assembled. It possessed the power of becoming invisible to enemies. Moreover this magical stick was very useful because it warned the clan when some danger was threatening. The ntjobo was then put into a fire; if it did not burn, this showed that the clan had nothing to fear from its enemies ; if it burned, it meant that the clan would be attacked and defeated. Then another stick would be prepared and put into the fire with the hope that it would resist it.

643 778 We shall speak in Part VI of another sacred *mhamba* which most of the Thonga clans possessed, made of the nails and hair of the deceased chiefs in the Tembe clan, and of the dried skin of their faces in the Shirindja clan. It was used as a means of propitiation in national calamities. In the Khosen country, the chief also possessed the *mhamba*. This was a mysterious object which the clan had always possessed, from time immemorial, from the beginning

1: Junod M-5 (1895-1909)1927 Thonga



heavily or stamped his feet on the ground, it sounded like the tread of an elephant.

This costume is a warm one, and the warrior carries a sort of bone curry-comb, made of the rib of an ox, shaped and sharpened, which he uses to scrape the perspiration from his face and body, when taking violent exercice or indulging in the dances descriptive of his prowess. Such is the native pocket-handkerchief!

The several component parts of the war-dress are kept in a little hut raised on poles, near the owner's dwelling, and are carefully looked after, being frequently dusted and exposed to the sun to preserve them from moths and weevils. A complete uniform is worth several pounds sterling!

*Arms* among the Ba-Ronga are of a very primitive kind, those of most ancient date being doubtless the *club* (nhonga) and the *knobkerrie* (gungwe) (1) of which two specimens are given in the accompanying illustration (No. 4). The Native never journeys without his stick, using it to kill snakes, should any cross his path, and should fortune smile on him, to knock over any quail that may rise at his feet. In quarrels or in war time this *nhonga* can be a dangerous weapon. The stick with the fluted head comes, I am told, from Bilen, and it seems that this style is in great favour in Gaza. It may have a phallic significance.

But the most formidable weapon of the South African Black is the *assagai* (tlhari, fumo (No. 2), of which there are two kinds ; the larger (likhalo) consisting of a sharp, pointed, double edged steel blade, fixed on to a stick with iron or brass wire, and the smaller (tindjombi) with a blade of the size of our arrow-head, fastened to the handle with strips of bark or of palm leaves. The former is for hand-to-hand combat, and the warrior never releases his hold of it, while the latter—of which three or four may be held in the hand when entering the fight—are thrown at the enemy from a distance (2). The length of the large assagai on the right of the illustration is as follows : Blade 14 inches ; binding of iron

(1) These sticks were given to me as dentistry fees for the extraction of decayed teeth !

(2) I once had an opportunity to observe the effects of the assagai. A young evangelist of our Mission was surprised on the railway line by some Zihlahla warriors

301 out that this custom probably had a social significance in former times, though at present it is practised as an adornment.

302 As regards *hair* (nsisi, mu-mi), women often cut it, men less

142

Maputju women with "tingoya." *Photo P. Aubert.*

302 frequently. A man only cuts his hair when his wife dies, as a [765] sign of mourning : it is a taboo (I. p. 146). In former times they never shaved their beards. People made fun of those who did so, saying : "Are you an Angolese?" (The Angolese, who are numerous in the neighbourhood of Lourenço-Marques,

302 used to shave their beards). Young men sometimes let two or three of their curls grow on their forehead like horns! Others stretch out their curls and smear them with a gluey substance obtained from the nkanye tree. This is called *ku hoba misisi*.

302 853 As regards women, those who are nursing babies regularly turn their hair into an ornament: the small curls are stretched out, smeared with fat and made to fall on the temples and on the occiput; they are then covered with ochre. This operation is called *ku hora misisi*, and the rats'tails thus produced are the *tingoya*; they are the characteristic ornament of women during the nursing period. Nursing women undoubtedly think the tingoya improve their appearance. "Look! She has *hora misisi*! How well it suits her!" people will say of a woman who has succeeded in altering her coiffure in this way. But this custom has also a ritual value (1).

Nursing women cover their whole body, their clothing, and their *ntehe* (I. p. 46) with *ochre*. The habit of anointing (tota) or smearing with ochre (tshumane) goes hand in hand with that of tingoya. This rather disgusting custom marks them as nursing, and is a protection (shisibelo) against the husband; so long as a woman covers herself with ochre, it is a sign that she will not

302 855 cohabit with him. They say also that ochre prevents the bad smell resulting from childrens' unclean habits, and that it softens the ntehe and makes the baby grow (2). The skin of children is also covered with a coating of this pigment; some say it is done not so much with the object of beautifying the child as of hiding the dirt which the mothers are too lazy to remove! No wonder that, in these conditions, it has been found that this smearing with ochre fosters conjunctivitis and other diseases!

177 302 (1) The Ngoni taught the Northern Thongas another and more elaborate way of curling the hair: the queens, wives of Gungunyana, transform their "thatch" into regular cylindrical chignons (shifoko), standing up like towers (I. p. 416). The Ba-Ronga have not adopted this custom, except, in some cases, the chiefs. (I. p. 386).

(2) It is very curious to observe that these two feminine modes of adornment, the tingoya and the ochre, have been adopted by the magicians, those who pretend to possess supernatural power in smelling out witches and treating possessed people (Part VI). They like to assume the appearance of women. People suffering from the Ba-Ndjao[1] possession especially use ochre. Their spirits order them to do so: they would torment their victims should the latter not obey.

1 [i.e., spirit--analyst]

302 The use of ochre is, however, not restricted to nursing mothers
539 or magicians : it is the special province of young marriageable
832 girls, wishing to attract attention : their brilliant skin shines like a mirror, setting off to perfection the white of their eyes and the black of their hair, which is sometimes made flossy by means of antimony or ground charcoal. A quaint saying puts it thus :

> Shindzingeri pundjene ? -Banhwanyana tolan !...
> What says the pretty bird with the coral neck that sings in the grass ?
> It says : Girls, anoint yourselves with ochre ! (if you wish to be as beautiful as it is).

177 Another ornament, of ancient date, is the *bracelet*. There
301 are several kinds : 1) the big heavy copper rings, called *masindana*, which greatly resemble those of the lake-dwellers, having a similar rather oval shape with an opening for slipping them over the wrist ; 2) the modern bracelets, called *busenga*, which the Rongas first bought in Natal, and which the Ma-Lemba introduced in the Northern clans ; they are made of iron wire twined round a ring of hide ; 3) the *mafowa* are more ancient, being made of seeds strung on thongs of skin, and are wound several times round the leg. This is an ornament for either dance or war.
301 The mafowa are sometimes made of the silvery cocoons of Argema Mimosae, the Queen Moth, which are found on nkanye trees, emptied of the chrysalis which is inside and filled with grains of millet which rattle when dancing !

301 *Beads* (nkarara) are evidently of later date ; they were introduced
499 by the Whites in the XVIth century, when the Portuguese were already in regular communication with Delagoa Bay and trafficked with the Natives, exchanging glassware for gold and ivory. Glass fascinated the Blacks : its brightness and transparency pleased
539 them immensely. An old song echoes their simple transports of delight :

> E ! Bashabi ! Batatana ba shabile ; ba buya ni shintshirimana sha balungoooo !..
> Hi ! Here come the buyers ! Our fathers return with their purchases ; they bring back with them the beautiful glittering things which the Whites sell !...

301 "A few years ago an ordinary glass bottle was thought a wonder by the people in the interior," said Timoteo Mandlati to me.

222 great care being taken to avoid crushing the small tender kernel,
252 the royal delicacy ! In times of famine the *mongo* is in great request, in spite of the trouble involved in obtaining it.

222 Another very valuable tree is the *nkuhlu* (mu-mi) (Trichilia
439 emetica I. p. 395) whose nuts are the *tihuhlu* (yin-tin) (1) the mafureira. This is a curious fruit, the nut itself being of a greenish black colour, bitter and very oily ; on this grows white pulp (bululu), covered with a beautiful skin of a bright orange, which, however, only covers about three quarters of the central black nut. The Natives pick this fruit in November and December, and stuff their cheeks with it ; the saliva softens the pulp, which melts gradually in the mouth, affording them a prolonged enjoyment of its exquisite flavour. One sees children, and also folks of mature age, with their cheeks puffed out as if they were badly swollen and throats contracted with the effort of sucking down the delicious pulp ; when nothing remains but the black nut which is called nkampfi, viz., the product of suction, it is carefully put aside and will be used for making vegetable fat ; or it will be sold to the Whites, who export them to Marseilles where, it appears, they are used for making really good oil. Let us hope these nuts, thus sucked clean by the Blacks, have never supplied any portion of our salad dressing ! But there is no occasion to be alarmed, as they are only used for making machine oil. The Blacks themselves do not use the tihuhlu oil for culinary purposes but for outward application only.

252 The *bululu* can also be made into an edible fat by the following
303 process : whole fruits of nkuhlu are first dried, then softened in water ; when quite soft, they are pressed between the fingers so as to separate the white pulp, which is then called *munyantsi*, from the black nuts (nkampfi). This munyantsi is cooked and the fat is skimmed off (wungula) with spoons as it melts and comes to the surface. This edible fat, as well as that used for smearing the body, is preserved either in calabashes or in sala shells (shikutja). The preparation of nkampfi fat takes place as

(1) A certain number of fruits instead of belonging to the dji-ma class, as is the rule, are incorporated with the yin-tin class, the tihuhlu, the tihlu (fruit of the muhlu tree), the tindjole (fruit of the ndjole), etc.

follows : the nuts are thoroughly dried (womisa), and slightly pounded in a mortar so as to remove the thin peel which covers them ; they are then winnowed, and ground into a kind of flour ; this flour is put into a pot with a little water and cooked ; the fat is then collected in a big shell of Achatina and kept for external use. The residue is called *bubindje*. 252 303

I do not mention all the other fruits, more or less succulent, which serve the Natives for food. One must be terribly famished to enjoy them. I may just specify the *pfilu* (dji-ma), Vangueria infausta, a kind of insipid medlar ; the *tjhopfa* (dji-ma), fruit of the *ntjhopfa* tree, which I could never muster courage enough to taste, and the *bungu* (dji-ma) sometimes dignified with the title of the Kafir orange. This latter is the fruit of one of the varieties of the india-rubber tree, which grows along the shores of Delagoa Bay. (Landolphia Kirkii.) In the Morakwen forest grow the ntjhole shrubs from which the *tintjole* berries are picked during the summer. 137 222

The *muhlu* or water tree bears a berry called *tihlu*, which has an agreeable taste. The *mphimbi* bears the *mahimbi*, a large round fruit similar in form to an apricot with a double stone. Both these fruits are used to prepare a drink, and we shall mention them when treating of Thonga drinks.

There are a few taboos to mention in connection with trees. It is considered dangerous to cut the trunk of any large tree. Should you wish to make a mortar of a nkanye, first smear some of the bark with certain drugs and also burn them at the foot of the tree before cutting it down. Should you want to cut down a nkwenga or a mahogany-tree, nhlapfuta (Ro.), shene (Dj.), to make a canoe, the master of the forest must first offer a sacrifice to the spirits of his ancestors who have been buried there. If you omit this precaution, you will be unable to find again the tree you have chosen. 782 824